

ADVOCATES

"A Family for Every Child"

Excerpts from a paper by the North American Council on Adoptable Children for the Annie E. Casey Foundation

By Lisa S. Vosburgh, Editor

Almost half of the children in out-of-home care at the end of the federal reporting period for 2000 were between 10 and 17 years old. In 2004 the South Carolina Children's Review Board reviewed 2,708 children over the age of 10; and according to review data, 624 are currently legally free for adoption.

Last August the Annie E. Casey Foundation published a paper written by Mary Ford, Research Associate for the North American Council on Adoptable Children, and Mary Boo, NACAC's Assistant Director. They researched existing successful programs, policies, and strategies that help older children find permanent families.

Their research showed that 1) every child, including older children, should have a case plan and action plan for permanence, 2) older children should be involved in their own permanency planning decisions; and 3) children have a better chance of permanency when they live in families rather than group care facilities. They also found that "jurisdictions that reduce group care placements and increase family-based placements are becoming successful at achieving higher rates of youth permanency."

The research also discovered the following common characteristics of

older foster children and youth: 1) older children are less likely to have family-based permanency plans; 2) children who enter care at older ages are at increased risk for leaving care without joining families; and 3) older foster children and youth have many special needs. "Approximately half of the youth who come into contact with the child welfare system need mental health services." (Burns et al., 2004).

Ford and Boo found that social workers and agency directors often assume older children are un-adoptable, and that independent living is used as a permanency goal. "Independent living programs describe a set of services, not a plan for permanence." (Avery et al., 2002; Badeau et al., 2000).

In discussing the emerging youth permanency philosophy, the authors state, "Older child permanency advocates believe that foster youths deserve to have families - whether a new family or their reconstituted birth family. Their mission is to open the hearts and minds of young people to permanency, and then open the hearts and homes of prospective adopters and guardians."

The full report is available from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 701 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202, www.aecf.org.

**SOUTH CAROLINA
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE
Division of Foster
Care Review**

Mark Sanford, Governor

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"It depends on us . . . another year lies before us like an unwritten page, an unspent coin, an un-walked road, the pages we'll read, what treasures will be gained in exchange for time, or what we find along the way, will largely depend on us."

Esther Balwin York

Mission Statement

The Foster Care Review Program provides an external system of accountability and advocacy for children and families involved with the foster care system. The Division utilizes panels of community volunteers to promote safe, permanent homes for children in foster care in a timely manner and to increase public awareness regarding the impact of child abuse and neglect.

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Directly Speaking ... Details From Denise

By Denise Barker, Director

"It is no use saying, 'We are doing our best.' To succeed, you must do what is necessary." Sir Winston Churchill

Welcome 2006! In the past few months I have been so encouraged by the work that so many of you are doing in your counties that I can hardly wait to see what we can accomplish by the end of 2006. Many of you answered the challenge and asked for spots on the agendas of your legislative delegation meetings to present our Annual Report. The positive ripple effect from these meetings has been tremendous! I have enjoyed traveling to meet with you prior to your presentations and glowing with pride as I see you stand up and show law makers your passion for the children and your pride in your work. So far you have presented to the Richland, Greenville, Lexington, Spartanburg, Cherokee, Sumter, Pickens and Anderson delegations. We need to do much more of this to keep the Review Board "out in front" and viewed as a resource on all children's issues facing legislators during the upcoming legislative session.

Your work is too valuable to have it go unnoticed.

If you have not scheduled a meeting with your legislative delegation, I urge you to do so. We have statistics and speaking points for you to use, as well as any additional support you may need. Just give me a call when you have a date, time and location. Your elected officials want to hear from you - our children need them to hear from you.

As you will see from other articles in the newsletter, this should be a busy legislative year. I urge all of you to stay informed and up to date as we send you information. Remember, the children cannot be there to speak for themselves, we must be their voices.

By speaking up and speaking out, **you** are making a difference.

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Strictly by the Board ***News from the State Board of Directors***

By Vernon McCurry, State Board of Directors

The State Board was very invigorated by our meeting with those local Board members who attended the 2006 Chairperson Meeting in December. Each time we come together I enjoy the productive dialogue that occurs. Without your input, the State Board would not effectively fulfill their role for the Division.

Our contacts will go on throughout 2006 and we will continue to track the results of your regular meetings with County Directors and other essential players in our process. You have done a good job getting the updates from these meetings to Beth, please keep up the good work! The progress we make in our communities as a result of these meetings, in addition to regular attendance at local board meetings, will work together to help us identify and capture the effectiveness of the Review Board Program. We need your help in using the new forms we developed to track the hours you spend on these "extra" tasks. If your board has problems in either of these areas, please do not hesitate to contact your assigned State Board members to see if there are things we can do to be of assistance.

For several years, the Annual Conference Committee has come together as an Ad Hoc group to plan and coordinate our annual meeting. Due to the importance of the work done by this group, I have established this committee as a standing committee of the State Board. It is time for this work to begin again and I have contacted a number of local Board members and asked them to serve on the committee for the term of two years, meeting as a group in conjunction with quarterly State Board meetings. This is just the first way the State Board will be utilizing the committee process

to involve more local Board members in the operational tasks of the Division. In the coming months we will also establish a standing Public Relations/Legislative Committee to continue the excellent progress made by our two Ad Hoc committees last year. You will be hearing more about this in the coming months.

Thank you all again for the time and commitment you bring to this program. Without you, there would be no external system of accountability for children in foster care in South Carolina.



Chairperson Training December 2, 2005

State Board Members

Vernon McCurry, Member at-Large, Chairperson

Dot Bailey, *4th Congressional district*

Martha Brock, *5th congressional district*

Burnet Mendelsohn, *1st congressional district*

Louise McFarland, *2nd Congressional district*

Vacant, *6th congressional district*

Anne Thayer, *3rd congressional district*

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN BECOMING A REVIEW BOARD VOLUNTEER?

- ◆ You need to be at least 18 years of age and able to commit to spending one day per month reviewing cases. You will be given an opportunity to work with others in the child welfare system to bring about positive change for foster children.
- ◆ Each review board member is appointed by the Governor, upon the recommendation of legislative delegations, and is required to reside in the judicial district of the review board.
- ◆ For more information, call the Governor's Office Foster Care Review Program at 803-734-0480, or contact your local legislative delegation.

South Carolina Heart Gallery

By Millie Qualls RB Coordinator



The South Carolina Heart Gallery continues to expand. Photo shoots are planned in February in Charleston for Region III Adoptions and in Florence for Region 1 Adoptions. These portraits will be exhibited in Greenville sometime this Spring. The Heart Gallery exhibit at City Art in Columbia (pictured left) featured children from Region 1 Adoptions. The exhibit drew quite a crowd and resulted in increased publicity, as well as increased traffic on the Heart Gallery website, which has also been expanded. You can now view all of the children's portraits on-line and even subscribe to the newly created "blog" at www.scheartgallery.com!

Portraits from Region II Adoptions are on display during January at the Hugh Main Library, 2nd Floor, in Greenville. An exhibit featuring portraits from Region I and Region II Adoptions is planned soon in Myrtle Beach. In addition, 10 to 15 portraits will be submitted for inclusion in the Southeast Heart Gallery in Atlanta in May.

For additional information and to learn more about adoption recruitment you may contact any of the following Department of Social Services Adoption Offices.

on the web at www.state.sc.us/dss/adoption

Region I Adoption Services, Greenville
1-800-868-6595 or (864) 241-1070

Region III Adoption Services, Charleston
1-800-922-1518 or (834) 953-9750

Region II Adoption Services, Columbia
1-888-711-7095 or (803) 929-2555

Region IV Adoption Services, Florence
1-800-763-6637 or (843) 661-2495

RESOLUTIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR

by Tonya Lewis, Medicaid Review Specialist

I think that it is a safe assumption Christmastime each year prompts most adults to start thinking about their list of New Year's Resolutions. By then, we have each eaten excessively, worked out too little and spent more money than we had originally planned. Although it would be easy to blame these behaviors on the hustle and bustle of the holidays, these habits are actually yearlong occurrences for many of us. Therefore, we set out to change the year ahead by "getting serious this year." Familiar phrases scribbled on paper include, "I will lose 10 pounds by Easter...I will not dine out more than one time per week to save money...I will join a gym." Sound familiar?

Adults' behaviors around the end of the year are fairly predictable. However, what can be said about children during the same time? Do you ever wonder if children make New Year's Resolutions? Chances are that children do not invest in this behavior like adults regarding such an annual event. After all, the weekend plans of children often depend upon the "resolutions" they make either daily or weekly. Have you ever thought about how your life would be different if every time you ate a piece of cake or skipped a workout someone was there to "pull your card," "take an apple" or give you detention?

These questions are not asked with the intention of making a determination as to whether children cognitively process events as adults process them. Rather, the intention of this article is simply to evoke your thought process about our realistic expectations and accountability of children. We expect children to alter their behaviors on a daily basis in an effort to teach children discipline. I agree with this need, but add, "Where is our discipline?" Do we only remember it the week before New Year's Day retrospectively? I wonder just how many parents would allow their children to take a trip to the movies or go to a friend's house this weekend if their child's resolution was, "I will 'be good' and do what my mother asks by Easter." The lesson here is not one intended for children as much as it is for those of us who approach New Year's Resolutions as if we were children in need of more discipline. The lesson is an easy one...Goal setting should be a daily occurrence for each of us. Research shows that daily personal goal setting increases our likelihood of happiness but more importantly sets a good example for the children who may be watching us!

"My philosophy of life is that if we make up our mind what we are going to make of our lives, then work hard toward that goal, we never lose - somehow we win out." ~ Ronald Reagan

Review Board Round-up

By Foster Care Review Board Coordinators

- ♦ **Review Board 2A:** Board members purchased Christmas gifts for a sibling group of three. Bank of America, Belvedere Branch, helped fund the project. *Tomika Jackson*
- ♦ **Review Boards 3B, 10A, 10B, and 10C:** Board members continued their advocacy efforts in 2005, doing their best to ensure that someone from each board attended community meetings between DSS, Foster Parent Association, GAL, MTS, and Adoptions. These efforts did not go unnoticed! *Michelle Crowder*
- ♦ **Review Boards 3B, 10B, and 10C:** For the past several years board members have provided Christmas snacks to show their appreciation to DSS Foster Care staff for all of their hard work. Thanks for your continued efforts to help strengthen relationships with DSS. *Michelle Crowder*
- ♦ **Review Board 5B:** Board Member Jo Hecker's husband's company adopted two children from MTS and provided them with numerous Christmas gifts, including bi-cycles. *Shirel Frazier*
- ♦ **Review Boards 5B and 5C:** Board members assisted in the Annual Christmas Holiday Drop-in for Richland County DSS, MTS, and Adoption Workers. *Shirel Frazier*
- ♦ **Review Board 5C:** Board Members, along with Denise Barker and Louise McFarland, met with the Richland County Delegation to express the needs of children in foster care. *Shirel Frazier*
- ♦ **Review Board 8A:** Board members purchased Christmas gifts for two boys living at Boys Home of the South. *Shirel Frazier*
- ♦ **Review Board 10C:** Board members anonymously adopted four foster children from the Angel Tree and purchased gift certificates for each child to ensure they had a Merry Christmas! *Michelle Crowder*
- ♦ **10C Review Board:** Board member Ed Zielinski and

his friends at Johnny's Body Shop periodically dropped loose change in jars, etc. at Johnny's Body Shop during 2005. At the end of the year they had \$400 in rolled coins. They used the funds to purchase 44 gift cards for foster children in Anderson County. Thank you Ed and the gang at Johnny's Body Shop for your generosity, and for making a difference in the life of a child. *Michelle Crowder*

- ♦ **Review Board 10B:** Board members donated a booth for DSS Adoptions and the GAL program at the Builders Expo being held February 10-12, 2006. The booth will display information to help recruit foster parents, adoptive parents, and volunteer guardians ad litem. *Michelle Crowder*
- ♦ **Review Board 11A:** At the December review Board members provided Christmas gift bags for DSS, MTS, and Adoption staff. Board Members also meet with the Lexington County Delegation. *Shirel Frazier*
- ♦ **Review Boards 13B and 13C:** Board members recently met with Keith Frazier, Business Manager for Greenville DSS. Keith shared his excitement about a new advertising campaign designed to recruit foster and adoptive parents. Keith's wife Charlotte, an Adoption Specialist with Region I Adoptions, no doubt added to his ideas! Keith has done a tremendous amount of work in the community to raise awareness of the need for homes for children in foster care, and he shared that the phones are ringing off the hook with calls from new families that are interested in learning more. He has garnered donations and discounted advertising fees from area businesses, which funded five billboards across the upstate. Review Board members generously donated over \$800 to the project for an ad in a women's health magazine. Ron Rossi, Review Board 13B, also arranged for Keith to meet with Greenville Magazine to discuss a possible article regarding this campaign. *Millie Qualls*

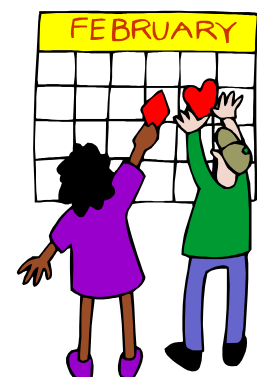
Save the Date !

Upcoming Review Board Training and Events!

The **New Member Orientation** training for January has been **rescheduled for Monday, February 27, 2006**.

Orientation training is mandatory for all incoming board members and is offered at least four times each year. If you have review board members who have not completed this training, please encourage their attendance. Volunteer GALS and Guardian Ad Litem staff are welcome to attend; please call to reserve a space.

The Review Board **Annual Conference for 2006** will be held on **Friday, April 28th** at the SC Hospital Association in Columbia. This year's theme is **"Building Strong Communities"**.



Foster Care Review News and Views: 2005 Community Partners Meetings

By Beth Green, Program Director

This past year, DSS county directors, local review board members, GAL coordinators and county Foster Parent Association presidents made a concerted effort to meet quarterly to discuss concerns, issues and needs impacting permanence for children in their communities. Overall, the results of these meetings have been extremely positive. Relationships have been established, group members have educated each other, communication has improved, problems have been resolved and county specific needs have been met.

The majority of counties and local review boards have engaged in the community meeting process. This has been a tremendous step for you as child advocates. I am convinced that collaboration at the local level is the key to making a difference for children in your counties. You should be proud of your progress. I want to recognize and congratulate the local review boards and county partners that have been extremely diligent about meeting and submitting written reports. Local review board members in the following counties participated in at least three community partners meetings during 2005, and submitted written reports to the FCRB State Office by January 13, 2006.

Abbeville/Greenwood
Anderson
Cherokee

Colleton/Hampton
Greenville
Marlboro

Oconee
Richland
Spartanburg

Congratulations! As we begin 2006, I challenge all local review boards to continue discussing the issues impacting permanence for children in your communities. Keep up the good work!

Foster Parent Association County Meeting

By Stephen Clyburn, Program Supervisor

On January 5, 2006 Stephanie Spink, Board 12B Coordinator, and I had the privilege and pleasure of meeting with the Marion County Foster Parent Association and four Guardians ad Litem from the Marion area. In all, more than 30 foster parents attended the meeting. Following a brief presentation about the function of the Foster Care Review Board, the participants had a wide variety of questions regarding the child welfare system. In the course of answering the foster parents' questions, Stephanie and I encouraged them to work closely with and communicate with the Department of Social Services, the Guardian ad Litem program, and Foster Care Review volunteers and staff. We also shared how important it is for foster parents to participate in or submit progress reports to the Review Board about all of the children placed in their homes.

On behalf of the members of the 12B Review Board, Stephanie and I also encouraged the foster parents to provide ideas for the needs of their foster children in order that the 12B volunteers can formulate service projects in the future that support the foster parents and help them meet the needs of the foster children in Marion County. The foster parents were pleased to hear that the Review Board was interested in supporting their efforts and they are certainly eager and willing to be a part of the permanency planning team in Marion County.

Foster Facts: 2006 - A New Year - New Initiatives

By Lisa Vosburgh, Data and Research Manager

In the fall of 2005 the State Board developed a three year strategic plan. One goal identified was to “Demonstrate the value of state and local citizen review boards to the foster care system” (an Evaluation Plan). While we all may “know” how important the work of the review board is - the challenge becomes how to accurately and successfully measure the effectiveness of the review board.

Simply put, a “program evaluation” is a means of carefully collecting information about a program, or some aspect of the program, in order to make decisions about the program. An evaluation is **NOT** about proving the success or failure of a program, nor is it necessarily a highly complex process using so called outside “experts”. An effective evaluation plan **IS** simple

in design, comprehensive in scope, and produces meaningful/useful results. The evaluation process includes some key steps: deciding what to measure, what indicators and benchmarks to measure against, designing a method for collecting the data, data collection and analysis, and then, based on evaluation results, making modifications to the program and/or process to ensure continuous improvement. Details about the plan will be available in the near future.

In other news:

- Review board staff participated in a “technical training” session with the new laptops.
- The first form has been sent to the vendor for development. A major step forward!
- The FCRB Web Site has been updated. Check it out at: <http://www.govoepp.state.sc.us/children/foster.htm>

Legal Lines: Legislative and Case Law Updates

By Michelle Dhunjishah, Staff Attorney

Legislative update

On January 17, 2006, Senator Ritchie introduced Senate Bill 1050 which includes the Family Court Reform Act of 2006, the South Carolina Family Court Hearing Officer Act, and the South Carolina Family Law Mediation Act. The bill is sponsored by Senators Ritchie, Ford, Mescher, Knotts, Bryant, and Setzler. The proposed Family Court Reform Act of 2006 mainly addresses alimony and child support payments. The Family Law Mediation Act requires mediation in domestic relations actions. Of particular interest to child advocates is the proposed Family Court Hearing Officer Act. If passed, the Family Court Hearing Officer Act would establish volunteer hearing officers for family court cases. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court would appoint the hearing officers. The legislation mandates that the hearing officers hear rule to show cause hearings and uncontested domestic relations matters. The bill would also authorize the Chief Administrative Judge in each circuit to assign child abuse and neglect cases to hearing officers. Hearing officers would serve at the pleasure of the Chief Justice and would have to be a member in good standing with the South Carolina Bar with a minimum of ten years of experience in family

court matters. The hearing officers would also have to receive a minimum of six hours of continuing legal education on family court issues. Orders and rulings issued by a hearing officer would be considered final and would be appealed directly to the Court of Appeals. We will watch this legislation closely as it progresses through the legislature since it will directly impact children in the child welfare system.

Case law update

A recent decision by the South Carolina Supreme Court discusses permanency planning hearings. In Morris v. Monceaux, the family court judge issued a permanency planning order based on the arguments of lawyers without taking any live, sworn testimony at the hearing, even though a family friend requested an evidentiary hearing. The Court emphasized that a plain reading of the permanency planning statute requires that a hearing take place when the facts of the case necessitate a hearing, when the parties contest material facts of the case, and when a party requests a hearing. Accordingly, when a party has requested an evidentiary hearing, the family court should not issue a permanency planning order based only on a review of the file, the pleadings, the GAL report, and listening to arguments by the attorneys. The family court should take testimony and have documents submitted into evidence.

**South Carolina Governor's Office
Division of Foster Care Review**

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Review Board Calendar

Foster Care Review Certification Training	Mon Feb 6th	SC Hospital Association Columbia
Foster Care Review New Member Orientation	Mon Feb 27th	10:00 am - 3:00 pm Edgar Brown Building
State Board of Directors	Fri Mar 3	Edgar Brown Building Columbia
Children's Advocacy Day at the State House	Wed Mar 8	Columbia
Foster Care Review New Member Orientation	Mon Mar 20	10:00 am - 3:00 pm Edgar Brown Building

APRIL IS CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

APRIL IS VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION MONTH

Foster Care Review Annual Conference	Fri Apr 28th	SC Hospital Association Columbia
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All locations in Columbia, unless otherwise noted; times subject to change.
Submissions are welcome; please direct them to the editor .

Advocates is published semi-annually by the South Carolina Governor's Office. The deadline for submission of articles for the next issue of *Advocates* (Summer 2006) is July 19, 2006.

Anyone wishing to submit an article should contact *Advocates* editor Lisa Vosburgh. Call 803-734-0474, or send an e-mail to lvosburgh@oepp.sc.gov.

The publisher reserves the right to make the final determination as to the content of each issue. Articles submitted are subject to editing and are not guaranteed inclusion.

NOTICE:

If you still want to continue receiving this publication, please notify us in writing by August 7, 2006; otherwise your name will be removed from the mailing list.